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### Truman Comes to Gonzaga: A Citation of Merit Awarded to the President of the United States

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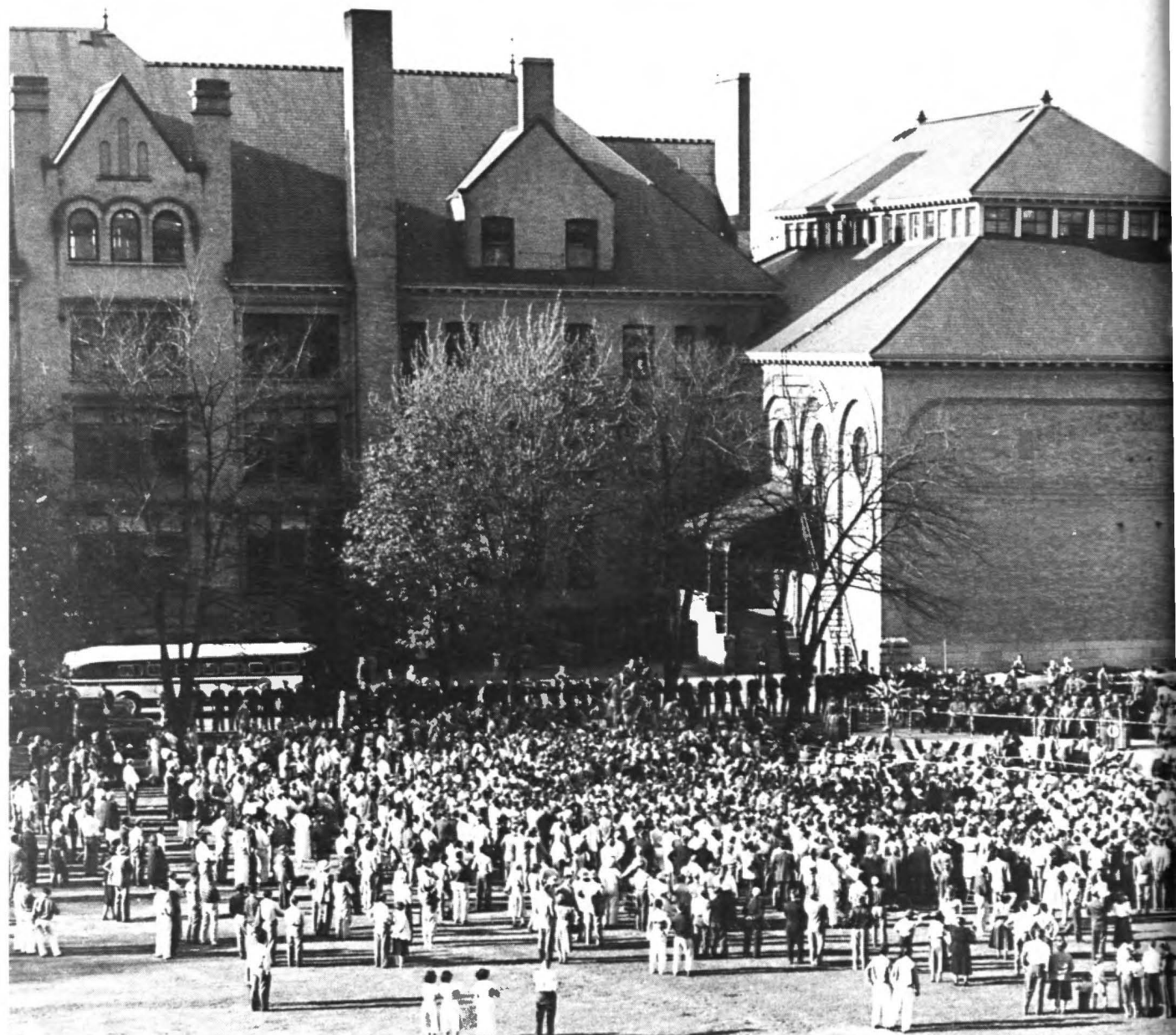
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Throngs of students and Spokaneites gather on campus to witness the arrival the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman. Photo courtesy of the Gonzaga University Archives.

**O**n May 11, 1950 President Harry S. Truman came to Gonzaga University to receive a Citation of Merit. His visit was the first time in Gonzaga's history that the nation's highest official spoke on campus. Accompanied by his wife Bess and daughter Margaret, Truman came to Spokane on

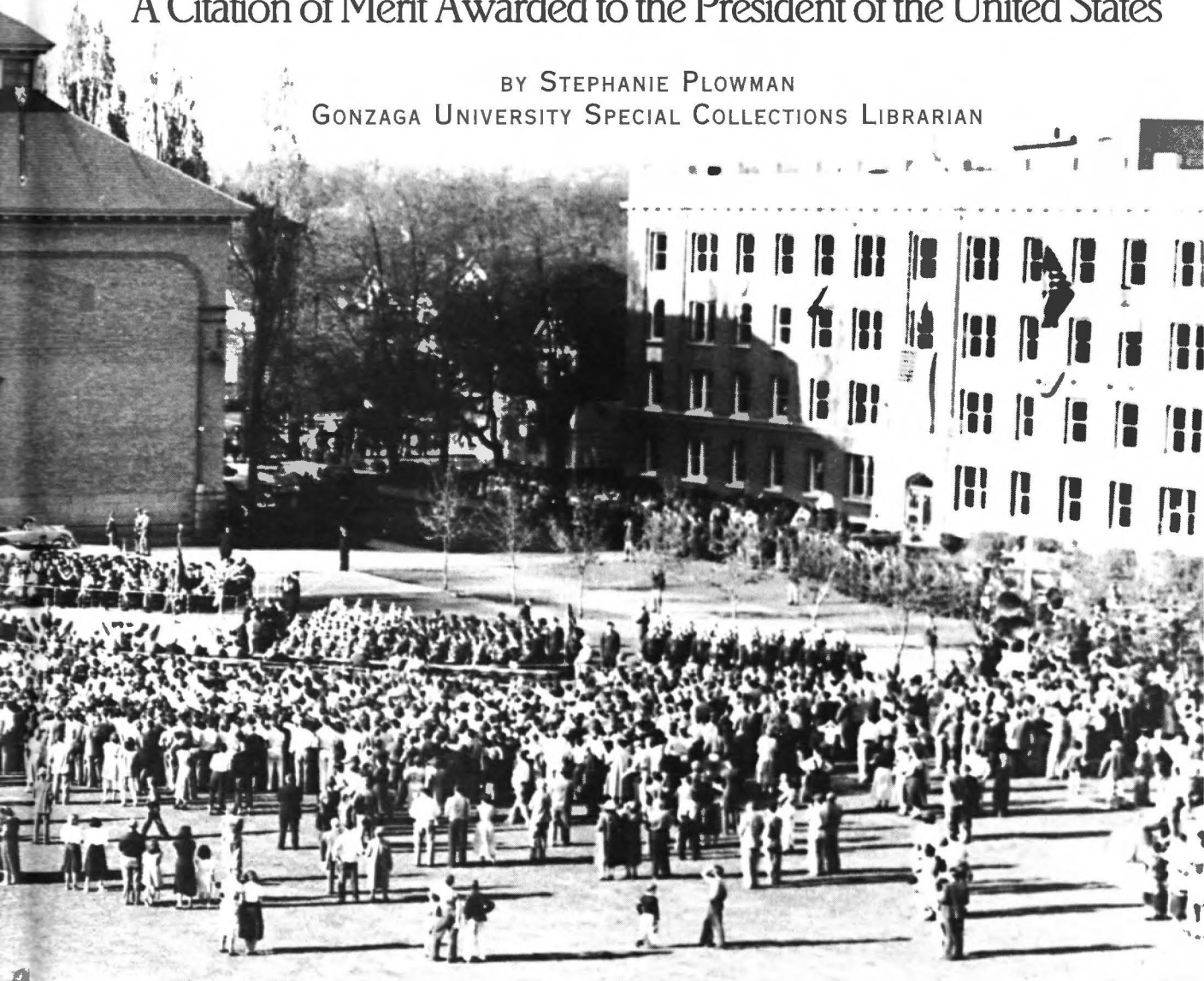
the presidential train after attending the dedication of the Grand Coulee Dam, where he spoke to 3,000 people.

Previously, on May 1st of that same year, the Spokane Daily Chronicle's headlines read: "Gonzaga Will Honor Truman." Gonzaga had only 10 days to

# Truman Comes to Gonzaga

A Citation of Merit Awarded to the President of the United States

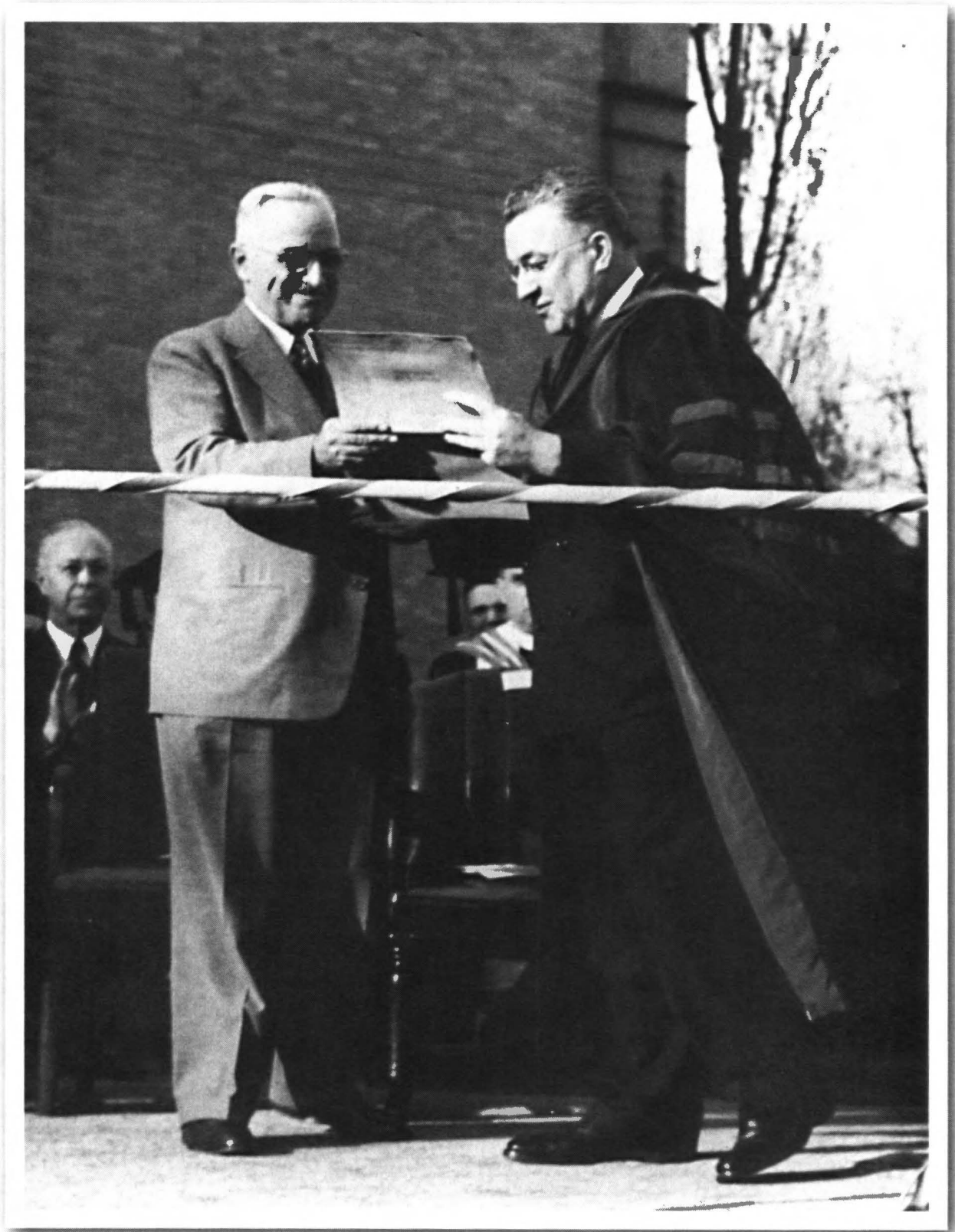
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prepare for his arrival, and naturally, the administration was concerned about protocol and appearances. A civic committee headed by Joseph Drumheller was formed. Campus renovations began under Fr. Arthur Dussault, SJ. Press rooms were installed in DeSmet Hall, the boy's dormitory. New phone and telegraph

lines were connected. GU's ROTC members were diligent in their preparations for their commander-in-chief's arrival. Helmets and guns were shined, and uniforms were pressed.

At the same time the ROTC's new standard arrived. Colonel Earnest Tabscott commander of





Pictured left, Fr. Frank Corkery, SJ presenting President Truman with Citation of Merit on behalf of the University (gp\_ig1222\_03). Pictured above, President Truman presents Gonzaga ROTC standard to Col. Ernest E. Tabscott (ROTC Commander) and Fr. Clement H. Rebimbal, SJ (Dean of Faculties). Photos courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

the ROTC oversaw the designing and making of the standard the previous year. The standard bearing the embroidered coat of arms of Gonzaga, came a few days before President Truman. With Truman's approval, the university scheduled the presentation of this standard to the ROTC unit during the campus event. This too was unprecedented for it was reported that no American president previous to this time had presented a military standard to an ROTC unit.

A huge platform for the 5:00 pm event was placed on the quadrangle behind the Administration building (now College Hall) facing the engineering

building. As reported by the Gonzaga newspaper the Bulletin: "The day of the event 2,200 chairs were set up in less than a half-hour, school windows were repaired, welcome banners and a thirty-foot flag draped the front of Dillon Hall (now Herak Center), the podium was vacuumed and decorated with large lilac bouquets, technical experts spent nearly an hour trying to fix an echo thrown back from the engineering building."

Prior to the start of the event, the platform was filled with dignitaries who included: Gen. Harry H. Vaughn (Truman's military aide), Monrad Charles



President Harry S. Truman arrives on campus in his motorcade, May 11, 1950. Photo courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

Wallgren (member of the federal power commission and former governor of Washington), Spokane Bishop Charles D. White, Spokane attorney Robert Dellwo, Senator Warren Magnuson, Spokane Mayor Arthur Meehan, Miss Spokane (Glenda Bergen), Reclamation Commissioner Michael Strauss, Montana Governor John W. Bonner, Bess Truman, and Margaret Truman. Seated behind them was the Gonzaga faculty wearing their colorful degree hoods over the traditional Jesuit black robes.

To start the event, the Gonzaga High School Band played "Hail to the Chief," followed by the invocation and the playing of the "Star-Spangled Banner."

Afterwards, Gonzaga President Frank Corkery, SJ addressed the crowd of about 4,000. His words referred to the world's bitter struggle against good and evil. He concluded by saying "Mr. President, we sincerely appreciate your coming to our campus, and we welcome you; Mrs. Truman, a gracious wife of the President and first lady of the land; and Miss Margaret, we are honored by your presence...Mr. President, when you leave this campus, our prayers will follow you, asking God to give you wisdom and fortitude for the trying days ahead."

President Truman then presented Gonzaga's new ROTC standard. Afterwards President Corkery

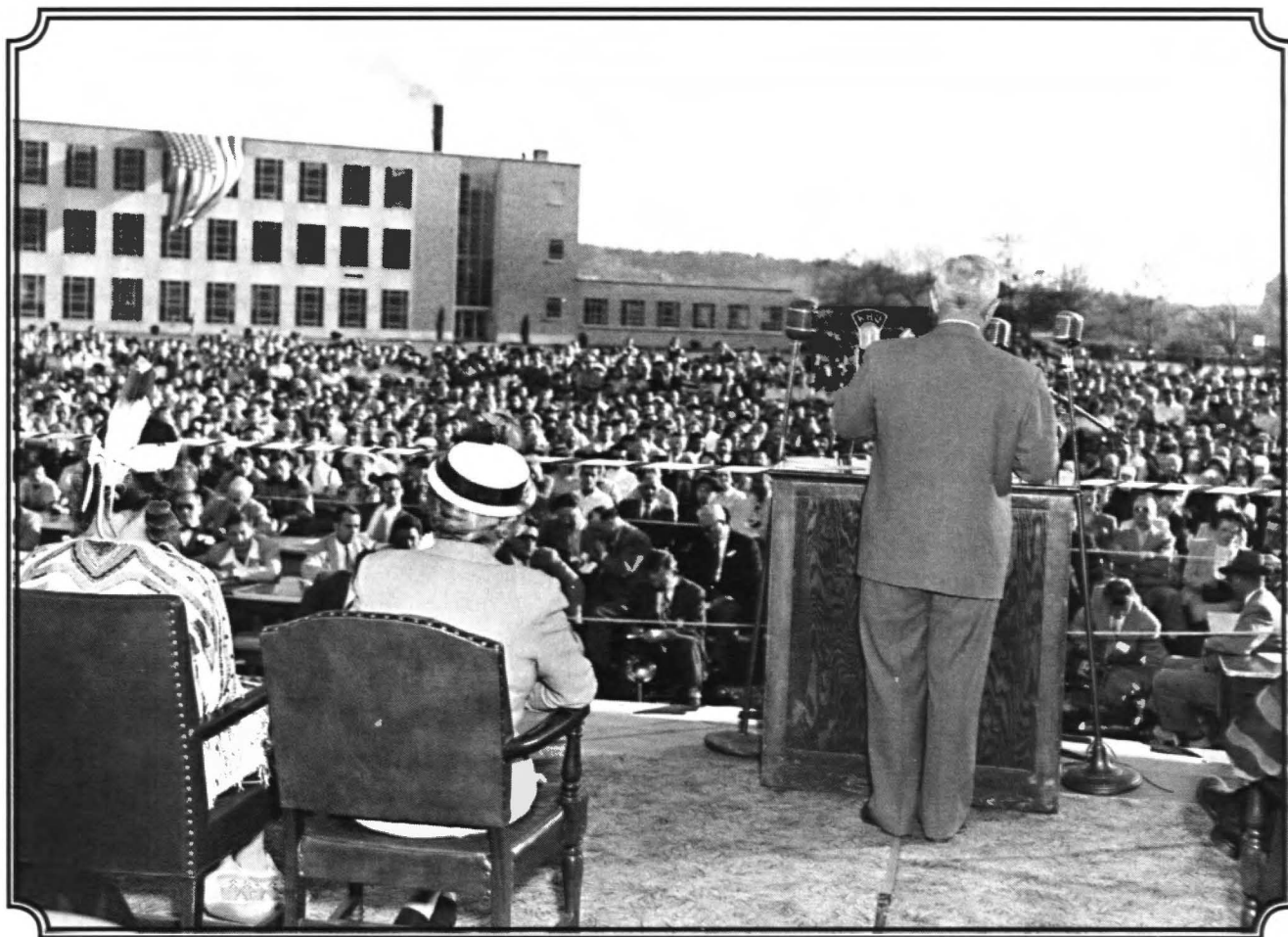


President Truman, Spokane Mayor Art Meehan, and Senator Warren Magnuson ride together in the Presidential motorcade. Photo courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

presented him his Citation of Merit. Truman, a religious man, deeply aware of the significance of Gonzaga's tribute accepted the citation with pride.

Truman then delivered a 10 minute speech. The Spokesman-Review with the headlines "President Truman in Spokane Renews Civil Rights Fight" reported the next day that Truman had stated: "I am very glad to be here today at Gonzaga University. I

appreciate very much your cordial welcome and the Certificate of Merit you have given me." Truman's speech then stressed equality and the dignity of man before God and the need to eliminate injustice and achieve lasting peace. Truman said: "I sincerely hope that the congress will enact legislation at this session to protect the rights of all citizens, to reduce discrimination based upon prejudice and to insure



President Truman addresses the throng of people gathered on the south side of Gonzaga's College Hall. Photo courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

that every citizen can participate equally in our national life." He stressed that all men are equal before God.

Truman's speech was well-received by the audience. Many newspapers including the *Spokesman-Review* and Catholic periodicals published the full text of his address.

Following this event, President Truman visited the Old Union Stockyards. While there, he was presented with a judge's white cane, the official emblem by Junior Livestock association officers. The President handed out ribbons to the grand-prize winners and praised Future Farmers of America and the 4-H club

members. He said: "I'm proud to pin these ribbons on the champions. It means these young people are on the right road. As long as you have young people like this, the welfare of the nation is not in danger. I'll feel confident when we turn the nation over to them."

According to Wilfred Schoenberg, SJ's book *Gonzaga University: Seventy-Five Years*, a year following Truman's visit, Fr. Corkery visited him at the White House, where he discovered that Truman arranged to have the Citation of Merit framed and placed on a wall in his office. President Truman told Corkery that the citation from Gonzaga was one of his proudest treasures. ☺